



TRUMP, TREASON, AND THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE EXPANSION OF TREASON ALLEGATIONS

On January 1, 2026, President Trump labeled the New York Times a serious threat to national security and an enemy of the people. This condemnation followed the publication of an article detailing the President's historical personal relationship with Jeffrey Epstein. Trump further categorized the media's reporting as seditious and treasonous after the publication discussed signs of physical fatigue during his second term. He contended that consistently publishing reports intended to libel the President constitutes a betrayal of the United States. Despite these allegations, the Justice Department has not filed charges against entities that shared footage of the President falling asleep during televised cabinet meetings.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEFINITION VERSUS LESE MAJESTE

The current presidential rhetoric represents a significant departure from the standard established by the Founding Fathers. The United States Constitution narrowly defines treason as levying war against the nation or adhering to its enemies by giving them aid and comfort. Conviction requires the testimony of two witnesses to an overt act or a confession in open court. Rather than adhering to this standard, the current administration appears to be employing a Lese Majeste

standard, which presumes that any action denigrating a supreme leader is a betrayal of the nation.

This expansion of the term is not unique to a single political party. Following the events of January 6, 2021, many Democrats sought to label all protesters who entered the Capitol as traitors. Even prior to those events, some political actors used social media to accuse individuals of sedition for filing legal challenges to election results.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS OF GOVERNMENT SECRECY

The practice of politicians condemning the media for treason to protect government secrets has a lengthy history. In 2006, the New York Times revealed that the Bush administration had conducted hundreds of thousands of warrantless searches of personal financial records through a banking hub in Belgium. In response, the White House labeled the media guilty of aiding terrorists, while congressional Republicans characterized the exposure of secret operations as treasonous.

Whistleblowers have faced similar treatment. When Edward Snowden exposed federal surveillance programs that targeted individuals for their web searches, members of Congress branded him a traitor. These instances suggest a bipartisan standard in Washington where government entities maintain they have nothing to hide while threatening those who prove otherwise.

THE PATTERN OF HOLLERING AND HIDING

Evidence suggests a recurring pattern where the intensity of treason allegations from politicians correlates with the severity of the crimes they may be concealing. For example, while the Justice Department previously claimed there was nothing left to disclose regarding the Jeffrey Epstein case, the FBI later discovered one million undisclosed documents.

Similarly, during the years when officials condemned the exposure of illegal surveillance, the government continued to hide details regarding the role of the Saudi government in financing the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Recent court cases have unearthed evidence that a Saudi official provided assistance to two hijackers and possessed technical drawings that could have been used in the plot.

THE LEGAL PROTECTION OF A FREE PRESS

Despite the rhetoric used by elected officials, the Supreme Court established a firm legal boundary regarding free speech. In the 1971 Pentagon Papers case, Justice Hugo Black wrote that the First Amendment exists so that a free and unrestrained press can expose government deception. The judicial standard maintains that the government's power to censor the press was abolished specifically so that the media could remain free to censure the government.

The attempt by political leaders to use the label of treason as a shield against criticism is like a magician who uses a sudden flash of light and a loud noise to startle the audience; the spectacle is not the main event, but a calculated distraction to keep the crowd from noticing what is being hidden up his sleeve.